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Editorial

Create the storm that will bring down the Arroyo regime

The people are filled with loathing at the US-Arroyo regime's endless cases of bribery, stealing and other dirty maneuverings. They are disgusted with Malacañang's brazen and seemingly insatiable use of billions of pesos from the nation's coffers to maintain itself in power and plunder the country's wealth without letup.

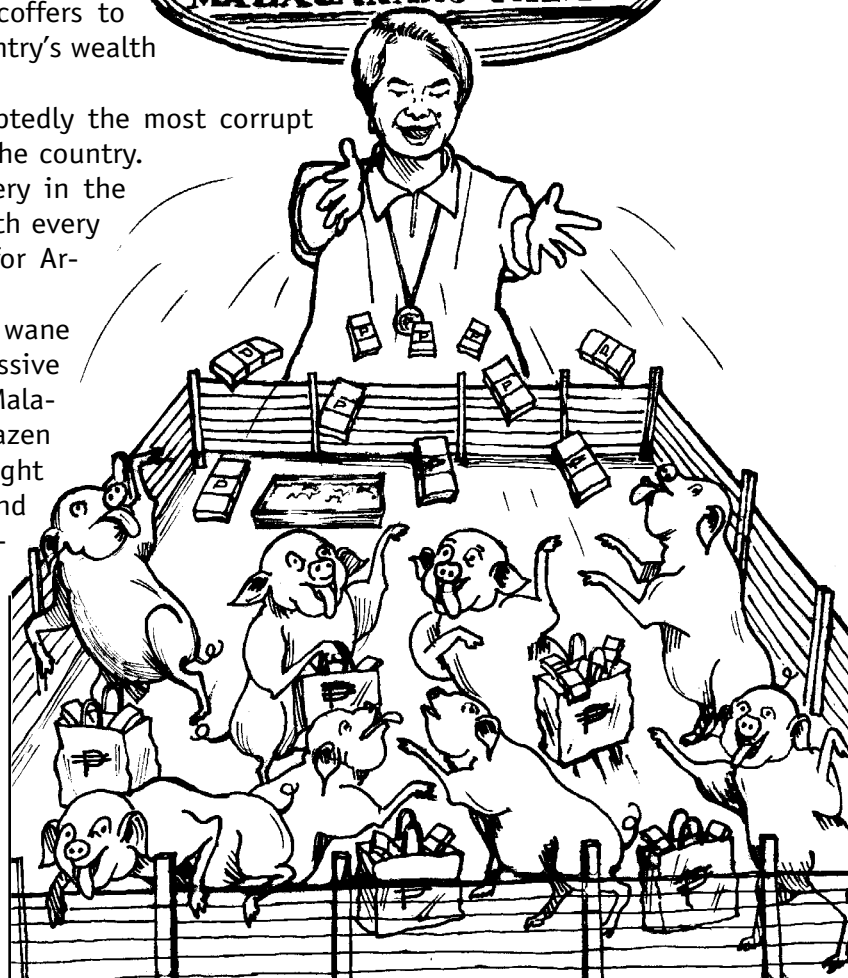
The Arroyo family and clique are undoubtedly the most corrupt and most avaricious of all ruling cliques in the country.

The regime barefacedly engages in bribery in the face of the grave crisis besetting its rule. With every case exposed, the crisis worsens not only for Arroyo but for the entire reactionary system.

The NBN-ZTE bribery scandal had yet to wane when the country was rocked with successive scandals of gargantuan proportions in Malacañang. One after another, Malacañang's brazen bribery was exposed to the public as it bought the support of congressmen, governors and other local officials. Hundreds of officials received up to ₱500,000, aside from tens of millions of pesos in "pork barrel" funds for their support.

Arroyo has been buying their support to ensure that congressmen and local officials will be on her side as she confronts major threats to her hold on power now and in the future.

The most immediate threat Arroyo faces is a brewing battle with House Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. Malacañang is hurriedly doing everything to oust de Venecia as



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Speaker because it considers him one of the biggest obstacles within the ruling coalition to Arroyo's plans to stay in power beyond 2010. De Venecia sided with his son Joey who blew the whistle on the anomalous NBN-ZTE deal where Arroyo and her key officials received hundreds of billions of pesos in kickbacks.

Arroyo likewise wants to be assured of the congressmen and local officials' loyalty in the face of attempts by the opposition to oust her via impeachment. She would also like to secure their support for charter change—to which de Venecia remains lukewarm. Arroyo plans on using "cha-cha" as the route to stay in power even after 2010.

Arroyo has even had the audacity to try to buy the loyalty of her political opponents. She made the mistake of bribing Pampanga governor Fr. Eddie Panlilio, who exposed the bribery attempt. Other governors followed suit and admitted receiving bribes. Malacañang committed an even bigger fiasco when it tried to bribe Anakpawis Rep. Crispin "Ka Bel" Beltran to support the fake impeachment complaint against Arroyo that it

had concocted. The regime's apologists strained to come up with explanations after Ka Bel and three governors bared the bribery attempts against them.

The bribery scandal grew even bigger when the regime's minions denied straight-faced that they had anything to do with it, despite testimony from those who received money in Malacañang. The latest twist has Malacañang insisting that it was Speaker de Venecia who was behind the bribery.

It is the regime no less that teaches the people how rotten the entire ruling reactionary system is. The people can no longer bear their terrible poverty and the regime's fascist repression.

Growing numbers are taking a stand against the corrupt regime. The impoverished and oppressed masses of the people who comprise the majority repudiate it. Even the middle classes are sick and tired of the regime. Aside from the continuing resistance waged by elements from the reactionary opposition, the ruling clique is besieged by a deepening rift. Majority of the regime's military and police force are enraged with and wish to with-

draw support and rise up against the regime.


The intensifying political crisis that is currently rocking the Arroyo regime is a gathering storm that is set to unleash a resurgent, powerful and decisive people's uprising that will finally put an end to the despicable and increasingly isolated US-Arroyo regime.

The objective conditions are already a given. The responsibility to arouse, organize, mobilize and lead the broad masses who are filled with loathing at the regime's rottenness rests on the organized progressive and democratic forces. It is important to combine painstaking solid organizing and protracted guerrilla warfare on the one hand, and fast-paced sweeping organizing, broad alliance-building and widespread mobilizations on the other, to take advantage of the exploding crisis and exceedingly favorable revolutionary situation.

There must be corresponding action for every anomaly exposed to allow the people to vent out their anger and loathing. More and more sectors must be aroused and encouraged to go to the streets and utilize other arenas and wage resistance in more active and militant ways.

The united front of anti-Arroyo forces must be quickly expanded and conflicts among reactionaries and even within the ruling clique exploited. Simultaneously, the mass movement must continuously strengthen and consolidate democratic parties, organizations and all forces for Arroyo's ouster.

For their part, the CPP and NPA constantly support the actions of the progressive and democratic forces. The Party and people's army's contribution will come in the form of tactical offensives against the most rabidly corrupt and fascist forces of the ruling regime to further weaken it and ac-

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Barefaced bribery

All day on October 11, the Arroyo regime's minions were busy giving out millions of pesos in bribes to buy the loyalty of congressmen and local executives.

Three rounds of meetings and bribe-giving took place inside Malacañang.

Up to 190 congressmen attended a meeting called by the palace in the morning. Witnesses said those who attended this meeting received paper bags with P200,000-P500,000 inside. Arroyo also promised them that they would each be receiving P70 million in pork barrel funds.

A meeting of members of the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP) took place in the afternoon, attended by Arroyo, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and Undersecretary Antonio Albano of the Office of Coalition Affairs. Forty-eight of the country's 81 governors as well as many mayors attended this meeting. Like the congressmen, the local government officials received paper bags full of money, with the amount depending on the size of their constituencies.

By evening, it was the turn of those who were unable to attend the previous meetings.

The public suddenly became aware of the bribery when Pampan-

ga Gov. Eddie Panlilio came out to say that Bulacan Gov. Joselito Mendoza had handed to his chief of staff a paper bag with P500,000 inside.

Mendoza admitted handing over the paper bag to Panlilio. He said a member of the Malacañang staff had given him two paper bags full of money. Besides Panlilio and Mendoza, others came forward to say they had also received money—Rep. Antonio Cuenco of Cebu City, Gov. Emilio Macias of Negros Oriental and Rep. Rachel Arenas, who said she had received money inside Congress.

Panlilio sent a letter to Malacañang inquiring which government agency disbursed the money so they could issue it a receipt. Malacañang had no response. Since then, three other congressmen—Rolando Uy of Cagayan de Oro, Mauricio Domogan of Baguio City and Bienvenido Abante Jr. of Manila have admitted receiving bribes. Abante even admitted that it was not the first time he had gotten "small gifts" from Malacañang.

As expected, Malacañang's minions and other officials on the take had an extremely difficult time denying, justifying and rationalizing the bribery. Some testified that they had received money, some said no bribery took place while some said that if any money changed hands, it was normal and there was nothing wrong with it. The bribes were alternately called "donations," assistance for the barangay elections, "pocket money," "gifts," "Christmas gifts," "incentives," "allowances" and "tokens," among others.

They even had different versions of what items were on the agenda in the meetings. One governor said they talked about the impeachment complaint. Arroyo maintained her silence over the issue as her minions tripped over themselves with their convoluted and contradictory statements.

Earlier, Anakpawis Rep. Crispin Beltran had exposed a bribery attempt on him by Francis Ver, deputy secretary general of Gloria Arroyo's party Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi). Ver had asked Beltran to endorse the fake impeachment complaint filed by Atty. Roel Pulido. Beltran said he was first offered P1 million and then P2 million after he refused the first offer.

Malacañang likewise attempted to bribe five other opposition congressmen in exchange for endorsing the complaint. Two of them were offered money a few hours before Attorney Pulido filed the complaint.

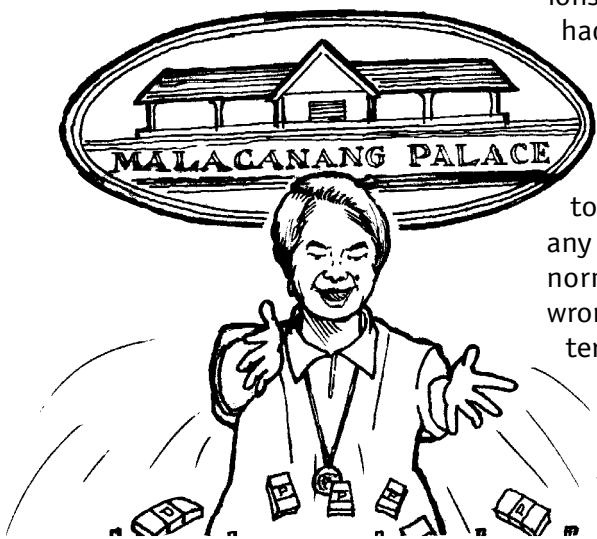
Kickbacks galore

No matter how despicable this latest bribery scandal is, it is not the first nor will it certainly be the last time the regime will be raiding the nation's coffers for its own interest.

On October 17, newspapers featured accounts on a Commission on Audit report detailing questionable expenditures by Malacañang in 2006 to the tune of more than P2 billion. The eyebrow-raising items included, among others, the use of donations for the rehabilitation of calamity-stricken areas to beautify the palace's golf course; undocumented loans; and discrepancies between recorded and actual inventories of Malacañang supplies and equipment.

Following are some of the striking anomalies uncovered by COA:

► giving out up to P615 mil-



lion to officials and employees, local governments and public corporations without corresponding receipts and documentation (in short, bribing them);

- ▶ appropriating more than ₱8.8 million in donations meant for calamity-stricken areas to beautify the Malacañang golf course (₱900,000), pay for hotel and conference expenses (₱3 millions) and donate ₱4 million to an unnamed institution (in short, pocketing the amount);

- ▶ giving out more than ₱269 million in loans from the Presidential Social Fund without documentation and without going through normal procedure;

- ▶ illegally transferring ₱112 million in Malacañang funds to local governments, public corporations and spurious non-governmental organizations.

Gloria Resign!

Such barefaced bribery and lies have sparked renewed calls for Arroyo's ouster.

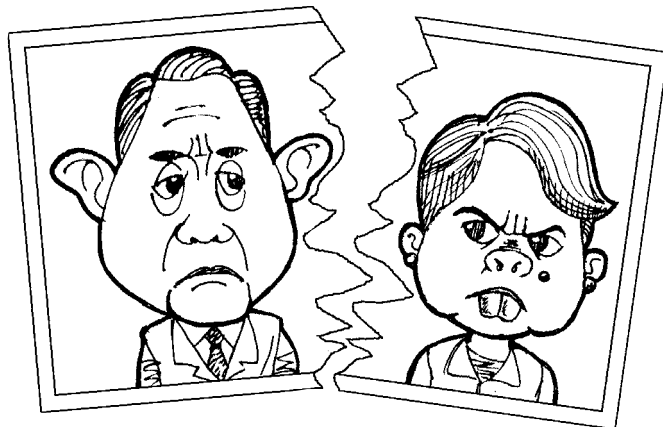
The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) has called for a Senate investigation into the bribery and strongly condemned the regime's "moral bankruptcy" aside from its economic bankruptcy. Catholic bishops Teodoro Bacani Jr, Deogracias Iñiguez, Antonio Tobias and Julio Labayen, Bishop Dan Balais of the Philippines for Jesus Movement and Pastor Domingo Rivera of Jesus is Lord have called for Arroyo's resignation.

Sen. Aquilino Pimental has in turn filed a resolution calling for an investigation. A similar resolution has been filed by progressive parties in Congress.

The bribery scandal has prompted Sens. Francis Pangilinan and Aquilino Pimentel and Rep. Crispin Beltran to call on Arroyo to resign.

Bayan, the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, Black and White Movement and other anti-Arroyo organizations have launched separate protest actions as opening salvo for the coming months. Rumors are likewise rife of renewed movements among anti-Arroyo officers and soldiers within the military. **AB**

Arroyo-de Venecia rift



The rift between warring factions of the Arroyo clique is worsening even as their political enemies have relentlessly been assailing and moving against the ruling coalition.

The rift has been festering in the open since Speaker Jose de Venecia's son Joey spilled the beans on the role played by Gloria Arroyo's husband Mike in the NBN-ZTE bribery scandal.

Earlier, the Arroyos spent hundreds of millions of pesos to advance the candidacy of Mayor Benjamin Lim of Dagupan City, de Venecia's political rival in the fourth district of Pangasinan. When de Venecia still won the election, Arroyo and her cohorts tried to bump him off as House Speaker and replace him with Rep. Pablo Garcia of Cebu.

Arroyo's latest plans to oust de Venecia reportedly involve putting Rep. Prospero Nograles in his stead. Nograles belongs to de Venecia's party but is loyal to the Arroyo couple. The decision was made in a secret meeting between Arroyo and six congressmen in Malacañang.

Nograles was reportedly chosen to prevent the ruling coalition from completely collapsing. This way, Malacañang will be able to score a coup against de Venecia within his own party and thoroughly defeat him.

De Venecia's waning power was demonstrated in his failure to block the passage of the latest impeachment complaint filed in Congress. The complaint was meant to preempt the opposition from filing a stronger case against Arroyo. The weak impeachment complaint filed by Atty. Roel Pulido was endorsed by Rep. Edgar San Luis of Laguna, an Arroyo ally.

Both progressive groups and the opposition railed against this complaint. Malacañang's hand has been exposed in the weak complaint that has been purposely filed so it could easily be junked by Arroyo's minions. Just like what happened these past years, the junking of this complaint will automatically protect Arroyo from having to face another complaint this year.

The Arroyo couple made sure that de Venecia would find out that they had bribed congressmen from both Kampi and Lakas to distance themselves from the Speaker. An Arroyo partymate openly offered the opposition millions of pesos in exchange for their support for the weak complaint. When the stink of the

bribery scandal had spread, Arroyo's minions quickly made their retreat and pointed to de Venecia as the brains behind the complaint.

If Arroyo's main operator Ronaldo Puno had his way, de Venecia's days as Speaker would be numbered. Although de Venecia has not completely closed all doors to a reconciliation, his wife Gina de Venecia has been busy striking alliances with the Black and White Movement and other anti-Arroyo groups.

De Venecia himself has reportedly had meetings with various opposition personalities like Sen. Panfilo Lacson, former president Corazon Aquino and Rep. Rufus Rodriguez of Cagayan de Oro City. De Venecia, in these talks, reportedly sought their support for Arroyo's impeachment.

Amid all this trouble, rumors are flying thick that key members of Arroyo's cabinet are discontented, among them NEDA director general Romulo Neri who testified at the Senate and was forced to cover up Arroyo's key role in the NBN-ZTE bribery scandal. Neri, who was openly coerced by the regime's minions, is reportedly ready to resign his post along with three other cabinet members.

Bayan Muna and other progressive parties as well as reactionary oppositionists have pledged their support to de Venecia if he would completely turn his back on Arroyo. Should this happen, the opposition will become a stronger bloc in Congress and a more effective tool against Arroyo.

Depending on their moves and the strength of protest actions in the streets, there may be enough congressmen to endorse an impeachment complaint to ensure that Arroyo will be automatically tried by the Senate. AB



NPA in Compostela Valley seizes 16 firearms

Red fighters of the Alejandro Lanaja Command of the New People's Army (NPA) seized up to 16 firearms without firing a single shot in a raid on the 72nd IB detachment in Barangay Canidkid, Montevista, Compostela Valley last October 7. Most of the seized firearms were high-powered, among them M16s and M14s.

The Red fighters arrived at the house of the barangay captain of Canidkid aboard a truck. Posing as Philippine Army soldiers, they ordered barangay captain Glorieto Mahumas, an active CAFGU element, to call detachment commander Sgt. Raul Reyes to an important meeting. When the sergeant arrived with Rudy Villaflor, another CAFGU element, the Red fighters immediately took them into custody and brought them to the detachment where the NPA called on the other CAFGU elements to surrender their firearms.

The NPA has conducted an investigation into Sergeant Reyes and the two CAFGU elements' possible involvement in crimes against civilians in Montevista, said Ka Aris Francisco, spokesperson of the Alejandro Lanaja Command. Mahumas and Villaflor are both active in recruiting for the CAFGU.

Elsewhere in the country, tactical offensives have also been launched against regular and paramilitary forces of the US-Ar-

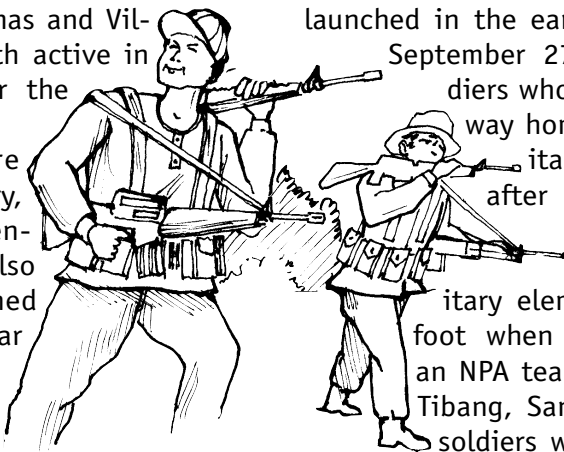
royo regime from the last week of September until the first half of October.

In Surigao del Sur. A sergeant of the Philippine Army and two elements of the Special CAFGU Active Auxiliary were wounded when an NPA platoon attacked the Paper Resources Industries (formerly PICO) warehouse in Pamaypayan, Lingig in the afternoon of October 12. Before this, the NPA burned one of the company's bulldozers as punishment for its antipeople and environmentally destructive activities.

In Aurora. A CAFGU element was killed after an NPA team conducted sniping operations in the capital town of Baler before dusk on October 9. The Red fighters slowly made their way to the 69th IB detachment before firing.

In Catanduanes. Five elements of the 65th IB were killed and 12 wounded in two successive punitive actions launched by Red fighters under the Nerissa San Juan Command (NSJC) on September 27 and October 6.

NSJC spokesperson Ka Theresa Magtanggol said that the first military action was an ambush launched in the early morning of September 27 against soldiers who were on their way home to the capital town of Virac after conducting a strike operation. The military elements were on foot when ambushed by an NPA team in Barangay Tibang, San Andres. Four soldiers were killed and



six wounded.

Another NPA team launched a second ambush against a 16-man platoon of the Alpha Coy aboard a truck on October 6 in Barangay Tilod, Baras, killing a soldier and wounding six others. Among those seriously wounded in the NPA harassment operation was 2Lt. Eduardo Dampo, the platoon leader. The Red fighters did not suffer any casualties.

On the other hand, the NSJC strongly condemned the military for using civilian driver Edgar Pinili as a "human shield." Pinili was killed during the firefight. The NSJC also apologized to the victim's relatives for his untoward death.

They nonetheless called anew on the people not to allow soldiers to hitch rides or use their vehicles during military operations and to refrain from riding in military vehicles to avoid being caught in the crossfire. **AB**

Crimes of the 65th IB against the people of Catanduanes

The NPA meted punishment on the Philippine Army 65th IB due to the many cases of abuse against the people of Catanduanes in the course of implementing Oplan Bantay Laya 2, said Ka Theresa Magtanggol, spokesperson of the NPA Nerissa San Juan Command. Aside from beating up villagers, ransacking their homes, seizing their cell-phones and aiming their guns at civilians, particularly in the towns of San Miguel and San Andres, elements of the 65th IB are guilty of the following grave crimes:

- the murder of Ka Joey "Bunso" Hernandez on July 17, 2007 in Barangay Danicop, Virac despite his being hors de combat;

- the killing of civilians Solomon Tabuzo, 64, and Gilbert Tabuzo, 17, on July 17, 2007, who were misrepresented as NPA members;

- the arrest in Barangay Tibang, San Andres of civilian Wilma Clavo, who was forced to hold an Ingram machine pistol and then accused of being an NPA guerrilla; and

- the mauling of Roger Clavo of Barangay Tibang, San Andres. **AB**

Killings of progressives, intensified militarization in the countryside

AFP elements have been relentlessly abusing and killing activists in villages and other communities in the countryside.

October 15. Soldiers of the 29th IB harassed Talaandig minorities in Capitan Angel, Malaybalay City. The soldiers ordered the Talaandig men to come out of their houses for "interrogation." Seven families were terrorized into admitting that they were either members or supporters of the NPA. One of the minorities could do nothing but cry in fear after being threatened with death by a soldier. Datu Migketay Vic Saway, one of the tribal leaders, has condemned the soldiers for ransacking their houses and sowing fear in the entire community.

October 9. A death squad operative shot to death Datu Basilio Bautista Luna, 52, a priest of the Iglesia Filipina Group (Alpha Omega) and a tribal leader in Purok 3, Bolhoon Village, San Miguel, Surigao del Sur at 7 a.m.

October 8. Two men aboard a motorcycle shot broadcast-er Jose Pantoja in front of the Mindanao State University in Iligan City. Pantoja is in critical condition in a hospital.

October 6. Troops of the 65th IB vented their ire on residents of Barangay Tilod, Baras, Catanduanes after suffering casualties in a firefight with the New People's Army (NPA). The soldiers illegally arrested and mauled all of the adult male residents of the adjacent village of Batolinaw and brought them to the Alpha Company's camp in Virac, Catanduanes.

The next day, soldiers ransacked every house in Barangay Sta. Maria, Baras. They likewise conducted an illegal search of the houses of Dennis Rojas of Barangay Paniquihan; Adul Icaranom, barangay captain of Macutal; Arlene Fabia of Barangay Rizal; and Soledad Raniegra of Barangay Caragumihan. The soldiers aimed their guns at Arlene Fabia and Arlene and Elmer Taniegra, all residents of Barangay Osmeña in Baras.

September 25. CAGU elements shot to death Titing Rodriguez, 47, and his son-in-law Rene Adlawan, 24, both farmers from Sitio Balwarte, Barangay San Antonio, Laak, Compostela Valley. The victims were then harvesting corn when they were approached by five armed CAGU elements who accused them of involvement in the killing of another CAGU member.

The CAGU elements continue to lord it over the area and have threatened to kill witnesses who would dare to tell on them. **AB**

Military abuses in Zinundungan, Cagayan Valley

The following is a correspondence report from Cagayan Valley on the continuing killings and militarization in Zinundungan Valley, particularly in Rizal town, Cagayan from August to September.

September 8. Soldiers pointed their guns at, and terrorized Bong Balasi, a farmer from Tungatong, Barangay San Juan, Rizal.

September 1. Military men ransacked every house in Sitio Turukutukan, Barangay San Juan and confiscated medicines from the health center.

August 31. Soldiers thrice summoned Enteng Agbayani of Sitio Ulma, Barangay San Juan, Rizal to force him into admitting allegations that he is an NPA supporter.

August 29. Soldiers arrested Matias Asco while he was hunting and forced him to serve as a guide in their military operations.

August 26. A platoon of soldiers used up half a sack of rice, dried fish, sardines, coffee and sugar owned by Boy Garon, a farmer from Sitio Baculud, Barangay Masi. Garon had set aside the foodstuff for workers in his swidden farm. Before leaving, the soldiers trampled on half a hectare of nearly ripened palay.

That same day, the military men also threateningly aimed their rifles at the Bartolome family inside their home in Sitio Baculud.

The soldiers also strangled Barangay Kagawad Ambot Asucena after finding a buckshot rifle in his house in Barangay Masi.

August 21. A seven-man squad of the 21st IB terrorized and pursued Junior Lanna, a farmer from Sitio Tungatong, Barangay San Juan. AB

Surface Juliet Fernandez!

Gabriela launched a protest action in front of Camp Aguinaldo on October 16 to demand that the military surface peasant leader Juliet Fernandez. Fernandez, 32, was abducted by elements of the 52nd IB on May 11 in Calbiga town, Samar. She organized local fisherfolk to join the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya).

Fernandez was formerly a member of the peasant women's group Amihan. She also served as secretary-general of Gabriela Youth while she was a student AB

Supreme Court issues implementing rules for the writ of amparo

The Supreme Court issued on September 25 the implementing guidelines for using the writ of amparo, a legal instrument expected to benefit victims of violence and human rights violations. The adoption of the writ of amparo was one of the results of a summit on political killings called by Chief Justice Reynato Puno. The writ will take effect on October 24. The Supreme Court is next set to issue implementing guidelines for the writ of habeas data.

The writ of amparo, along with the writs of habeas corpus and habeas data may be used by victims and their families to demand that authorities surface victims of abduction and killings and secretly detained suspects and present them in court. Under the writ of amparo, authorities can no longer simply deny having custody of a missing person. They must show proof that the missing persons are not being held in their camps or safehouses. The courts also have the right to search offices, camps and other police and military facilities to prove that no victims are being kept in these premises. A person under surveillance by the military may also seek protection from the court to avert any harm that might befall him. Under the writ of habeas data, courts have the authority to order the military to present documents on suspects and show cause for incarcerating, abducting or placing them under surveillance.

A writ of amparo may be filed any time. Its application can also be invoked for cases that predate its approval, such as the abduction and disappearance of activists Jonas Burgos and Karen Empeño.

Although the writ of amparo has long existed as a means of protection for citizens of various countries in Latin America, this is the first time it is going to be applied in the Philippines. Human rights advocates are currently studying the writ to see how it could be used to protect the people.

Meanwhile, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) pointed out that aside from the writ of amparo, there is need for more laws to protect citizens from torture and abduction, provide legal assistance and compensation for victims and their families and protect witnesses. AB

Imperialist plunder in the agricultural sector

In the history of the puppet republic, various bogus programs of the reactionary state on agrarian reform and agricultural development have merely served as instruments to further the plunder by imperialists, local landlords and comprador capitalists of the country's agriculture and natural resources. This is aside from serving as instruments to deceive the peasantry and thwart the armed revolutionary movement.

The massive restructuring of agriculture to further serve imperialist plunder began during the US-Marcos dictatorship. The dictatorship launched the so-called Green Revolution to support its sham agrarian reform program. In fact, Masagana 99 and similar programs under the "Green Revolution" only paved the way for the complete dependence of the country's agriculture on imperialist products such as fertilizers, pesticides and even seeds. Such products killed indigenous and traditional crops which were replaced by hybrid varieties that needed massive doses of imported fertilizers and pesticides.

All this worsened when the US-Aquino regime enacted its version of fake land reform—the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (CARL)—and launched corresponding agricultural support programs. The most striking features of the US-Aquino regime's land reform involved loopholes such as the Stock Distribution Option that enabled big plantations, among them the Cojuangco-Aquino-owned Hacienda Luisita—to avoid being covered by CARL.

The succeeding US-Ramos regime set up Agrarian Reform Communities (ARC) to serve as showcases of CARL's alleged successes and cover up its failures. The ARC featured Key Produc-

tion Areas (KPA) that obliged peasants to specialize in certain crops, mainly non-traditional exports like asparagus and ornamental flowers, instead of rice and corn. Thus, the erstwhile five million hectares devoted to rice and corn dwindled to a mere 1.9 million hectares, with 3.1 million hectares converted to hog and poultry farms, plantations of flowers for export and the like.

In accordance with the ARC's design, the government accelerated and encouraged cooperative ventures between the ARC and agribusiness companies, most of which were geared towards production for export. Among the various cooperative ventures were contract-growing, joint ventures and lease arrangements.

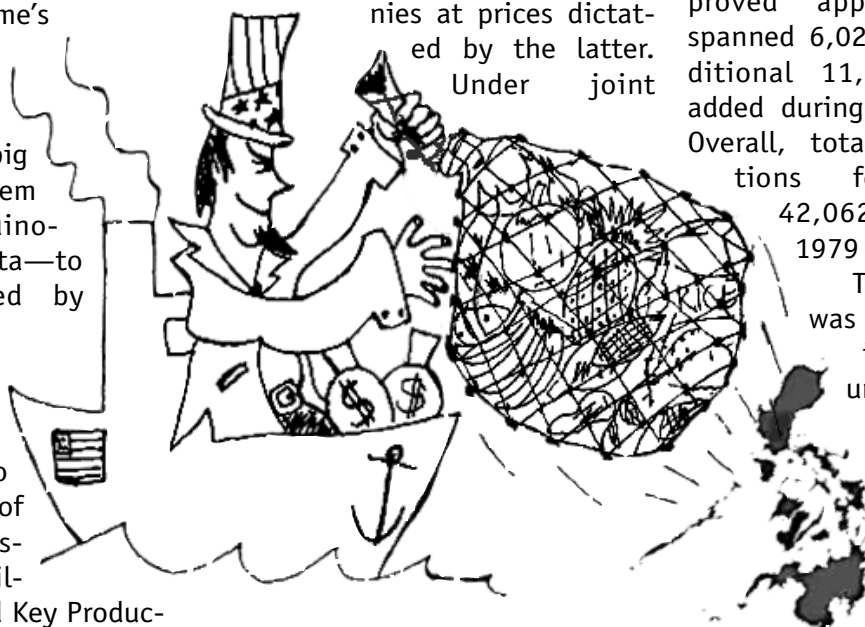
Under contract-growing, agribusinesses pay farmers to plant what the company wants. The products are bought by the companies at prices dictated by the latter. Under joint

ventures, private companies partner up with peasant cooperatives. The private companies provide the facilities, technology, training and overall management while the farmers work on the land. Under lease arrangements, private enterprises rent lands already awarded to farmers on condition that the farmers stay on to till the land. It is the private investors who control the production, processing and sale of agricultural products.

From 1996 to 2002, there were 1,059 cooperative ventures between ARCs and more than 394 agribusiness enterprises.

The US-Ramos regime likewise passed EO 124 on September 8, 1993 that identified certain areas for land-use conversion (LUC) and crop conversion. In 1995, Congress approved RA 7881 that amended CARL and exempted lands falling under LUC from being covered by agrarian reform—such as former agricultural lands converted to fish ponds and prawn farms. Worse, the new law allowed the conversion of agricultural lands to commercial and big-time fish ponds and prawn farms. From 1979 to 1991, approved applications for LUC spanned 6,025.4 hectares. An additional 11,721 hectares were added during the Estrada regime. Overall, total approved applications for LUC covered 42,062.83 hectares from 1979 to 2004.

The agricultural sector was further laid open to imperialist plunder under former president Joseph Estrada. On December 22, 1997, the 10th Congress approved the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization



Act (AFMA) or RA 8435 which was allegedly a measure to develop and raise incomes in the agriculture and fisheries sector and prepare them for the "globalization challenge." The government allocated P20 billion or \$377.50 million per year for the AFMA, with most of it sourced from foreign banks and financial institutions like the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund of Japan (28%); Asian Development Bank (22%); and US Public Law (16%).

AFMA systematized and fast-tracked land-use and crop conversion and landgrabbing of farms by multinational corporations. All agricultural lands deemed appropriate for planting various export crops were identified through the establishment of the Network of Protected Areas for Agricultural and Agro-Industrial Development and the Strategic Agriculture and Fisheries Development Zones to facilitate their acquisition by foreign corporations.

By zealously implementing im-

Shrinking farmlands

Land-use and crop conversion have had a deleterious effect on the production of the country's leading food crops. Instead of expanding, lands planted to rice and corn were reduced during the 1990s. Government statistics reveal that rice lands fell by 86,606 hectares and corn lands by 298,064 hectares from 1991 to 2002. It thus comes as no surprise that the country now imports rice and corn. The reduction of arable lands has also resulted in the severe dislocation of many rice and corn farmers.

More peasants have lost their land. Overall, agricultural lands have been reduced to 304,078 hectares from 1991 to 2002. Worse, landlords and agribusiness corporations were able to effectively use land-use conversion as an instrument for grabbing lands from beneficiaries of sham agrarian reform. **AB**

perialist "globalization" policies and the corresponding neoliberalization, deregulation and the entry of big private and foreign companies to economic sectors previously reserved for Filipinos, the US-Arroyo regime has worsened the imperialist plunder of agriculture.

Under the US-Arroyo regime, imperialist companies have stepped up their penetration of the country's agriculture and flooded

the Philippines with imported agricultural products. Peasants have been further mired in bankruptcy and poverty.

The US-Arroyo regime is also pushing the enactment of the Agricultural Credit Bill that does away with the ten-year prohibition on the sale and transfer of distributed lands (whether unamortized, partly or fully amortized). The bill's main proponents are no less than the World Bank and landlords in Congress. The bill deprives small farmers of already limited protection against those who want to grab their lands. It likewise removes the five-hectare retention limit provided by CARL.

With peasants perpetually neck-deep in debt, they are forced to sell their lands to landlords or go into usurious credit arrangements such as mortgaging their lands or papers signifying various forms or levels of possession such as Emancipation Patents, Certificates of Land Ownership Agreement and Certificates of Land Transfer in exchange for agricultural loans. Meanwhile, the removal of the five-hectare retention limit consolidates and accelerates the reconcentration of vast tracts of land in the hands of big landlords, both old and new. **AB**

Protest caravan in Southern Tagalog

Peasants and their supporters simultaneously launched on October 15 a series of protest caravans in the cities and town centers of Southern Tagalog to condemn the inutility of the government's agrarian reform program. The caravan, timed with the commemoration of "Peasant Week," was launched in Lucena City, capital of Quezon province.

Accompanying the peasants were their families who came all the way from Bondoc Peninsula in Southern Quezon. Similar protest actions were conducted in Trece Martires, Cavite; Antipolo City, Rizal; Batangas City; and Sta. Cruz, Laguna.

The peasants likewise demanded the return of the multi-million peso "coconut levy fund" (which was forcibly collected from coconut farmers during martial law), a stop to militarization in the countryside and the abrogation of the Calabarzon Development Project and the destructive Philippine Mining Act.

Meanwhile, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) chair and Anakpawis Party president Rafael Mariano announced the establishment on October 10 of the Pagkakaisa para sa Tunay na Repormang Agraryo (PATRIA) that will draft a new bill on land distribution which they will present to Congress in November. **AB**



US secretly allows the use of torture

There have been recent disclosures in the US of secret memoranda authorizing the use of torture on suspected terrorists. The memoranda, dubbed by the US media as "torture memos" and issued by the US Justice Department since 2003 have been used as bases by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to torture detainees in Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and many secret prisons in Europe and the Middle East.

The memo allows CIA investigators to use brutal methods of extracting information, among them mock drowning, partial strangulation, electrocution, head-slapping, induced hypothermia through confinement in freezing cells while naked, sleep deprivation, bombardment with loud noises and nonstop interrogation. Even methods that may result in "death, organ failure or permanent impairment of a significant body function" are allowed, so long as they do not "shock the conscience."

US Pres. George W. Bush vehemently denied the existence of secret prisons and use of torture. But when pictures came out on the internet of naked detainees being mocked by American soldiers in Abu Ghraib, the US military defensively retorted that they were isolated cases and occurred without officers' permission. Officers consistently denied that the CIA's methods of extracting information on terrorism constituted torture.

In one particularly notorious case of torture in the prisons of Guantanamo, no less than the Justice Department's own lawyers have admitted that the information extracted was useless. A detainee, Khalid Mohamed was arrested for allegedly masterminding the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. He was tortured more than a hundred times, including a two week period of being subjected to water boarding or simulated drowning. Under severe torture, he revealed many things to investigators, which were later proven to be exaggerations, incredible and false. A case filed against Mohamed's torturers has yet to prosper in court.

Human rights advocates have filed a case in the United States Supreme Court after the revelations on torture and the illegal detention of suspected al Qaeda elements. The Supreme Court declared in 2006 that detainees accused of being al Qaeda elements were protected by the Geneva Conventions and therefore had rights against being tortured. Bush has since been compelled to transfer them from Guantanamo and allow them to have access to counsel. The CIA has also been forced to put a stop to water boarding.

This July, however, President Bush came out with another torture memo where he allowed the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" and "black sites" or secret CIA prisons. The complete details of this memo have yet to be disclosed.

The latest memo's exposé and the US' brazen disregard for laws and international rules on warfare has compelled the US Justice Department to withdraw the memo. But it has not adjudged as illegal the torture perpetrated by the CIA in the past. Neither has it admitted that torture continues to be practiced and secret prisons maintained in Thailand, Afghanistan and many European countries.

AB

Fascist bombing in Makati

THE Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) condemns in the strongest possible terms the bombing of the Glorietta 2 Mall in Makati City on October 19. The CPP extends its deepest sympathies to the victims and their families and loved ones.

This bombing can only be the handiwork of fascist forces at the beckon of the Arroyo regime. Only Gloria Arroyo and her rotten, corrupt and fascist gang will benefit from this dastardly and cowardly act of terrorist violence. It was designed to draw attention away from the enormous bribery scandals, plunderous schemes and other heinous crimes of her regime that are daily being exposed, and to derail the widespread and growing clamor for Arroyo's ouster.

Right after the blast, Arroyo took advantage of the situation to deflect criticism and issue warnings against "destabilizers." The Makati bombing serves to provide the Arroyo regime with a justification to impose "emergency rule" and carry out a clamp-down against brewing anti-Arroyo protest actions. The Arroyo regime morbidly fears that protests may grow beyond the capacity of its armed forces and police to handle. It trembles at the growing possibility of another people power uprising.

The CPP called on the Filipino people not to be intimidated and instead intensify their protests and put into decisive action their clamor for Arroyo's ouster. At the same time, the people should exercise vigilance and militantly oppose any move by the Arroyo regime to proceed with its plan to impose outright military rule.

The CPP-NPA also urges conscientious officers and men of the AFP and PNP to reject and expose the dirty tactics being carried out by Malacañang and its top security and defense officials.